

National Policy Implications of the Basic Needs Model

Soedjatmoko

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The basic needs approach considers the improvement of the living conditions of the lowest 40 percent in terms of food, health, housing, water, sanitation, provision of employment and education. Soedjatmoko argues that the BN strategy becomes "meaningful only when it is firmly set within a framework of area (regional) and national development policies that are capable of coming to grips with the structural impediments to such change in emphasis, and to social development in general." For the BN strategy to work fundamental changes are necessary, amounting to "a structural transformation and a fundamental change in the redistribution of economic and political power." Among these changes Soedjatmoko lists the changing balance between rural/urban, centre/periphery, reduction in consumption levels of the elite as part of the reallocations of resources in favour of the countryside, the need for the active participation of the previous disenfranchised or socially ineffective sectors of the population in national political life (which will require the broadening of the political power base).

As he sees it, all should be involved in the development strategy and the main focus should be on village communities. The overall quality of life in the village is to be improved with the active participation of the poorer sections of the community. Such a strategy will require "changes in the local distribution of power in the direction of democratisation." The Western road was via increased individualisation but there are many in the West who doubt the validity of that way-it was strongly criticised by those who saw the consequences as the journey got underway and there are those who now wish to warn their friends in the Third World of the sad consequences of that route. Soedjatmoko does not comment on the outcome of individualisation, personal self-reliance and initiative in the West but, given the realities in the Third World today, he sees the need to "stimulate contrary values, a greater capacity for co-operation, rather than individual competition, greater sense of social solidarity, an emphasis on mutual obligations rather than on individual rights, and an acceptance of voluntary individual self-restraint for higher collective goals."

/sought

The Third World may have to chose a different path to human growth. According to Soedjatmoko, the West/individualisation in the pursuit of individual happiness, these societies by choice as well as by necessity may achieve emancipation, self-definition and self-filment in community. In this consideration of the role of culture in development, Soedjatmoko makes special mention of religion which has "shaped people's perception of the meaning of life, and of their relationships to their fellow human beings, to society, to nature as well as to the transcendental. [Moreover] it still constitutes a powerful source of moral validation, and of motivation for individual and social action." As I was strongly reminded by the statt of the IAIN in Yogya, Christianity in their minds was associated with individualism of an excessive kind and with nineteenth century imperialism. In the same way, Islam is in part Darul Islam, and the quest for a religious state by force of arms. But Soedjatmoko's point is well taken when we consider the role of some of the pesantren and Catholic institutions in the countryside.

Soedjatmoko is aware that the Basic Needs Model could become a scheme for the provision of certain aspects of material welfare and in the process ignore the participatory aspects of development. In this respect he again emphasises the powerlessness and dependency of the poorest. Bismarck gave to the German people certain social welfare programmes to stave off political opposition but he made no attempt to involve the masses in decision making. On the other hand, Soedjatmoko insists that "freedom is in itself a basic need, if the meeting of basic material needs is to lead to emancipation and self-reliance."

Political risks are involved in any attempt to tackle the prblems of equity and employment, but no less risky are the strategies which ignore these issues. Some governments have been unable to make the transition from growth to equity goals, some have tried and failed. In both cases, the political implications of the BN model are clear. It is "a profoundly political enterprise affecting vested interests and real, as well as perceived threats to those interests, often invoking primordial fears and violent reactions."

In discussing the implementation of a BN strategy, Soedjatmoko points to a paradox: the rquiremmts of the model invite a dgree of state intervention and control which only a totalitarian state would be capable of generating and maintaining. But this would, he continues, undoubtedly destroy the opportunities to develop among the poorest part of the population. "We are faced here with a crucial contradiction inherent in the development process. On the one hand there is the need for strong central power and economic rationality from the top, capabable of bringing about major structural changes and a rational allocation of limited resources. On the other hand, the building of a participatory society requires freedom, as an essential condition to develop the capacity of a society to organise itself. Local autonomy, self-reliance and socially effective participation at the village level are inalienable parts of that freedom." From this he concludes that the BN model must be looked at as being "a potentially important building block in a democratic theory of development, still to be formulated." (my emphasis).

Two other aspects are worth noting. First, Soedjatmoko says that no-one has clarified how it would fit into different types of society: a socialist model, a classical market economy, or a mixed economy. Second, it is stressed once again that the BN model in terms of programme lends itself to both paternalistic and authoritarian methods of implementation. If Tawney is right, Calvin's ideas were suited to both a collectivist and an individualistic society... Soedjatmoko is concerned that those favouring a BN approach would defend their use of totalitarian methods to achieve that end. The dilemma can be resolved by insisting that meaningful mass participation and freedom are the absolute values of the system and that development is a process towards basic needs, a process which emphasises the vital importance of means to achieve specified ends.

concern about the contradictory goals of freedom and equity
lead Soedjatmoko to the need for a new theory of democratic development. Such
a theory would have to be relevant to the problems of humankind today and to-
morroww, irrespective of whether people live in industrial, post-industrial
/the society, and irrespective of whether/people concerned are affluent or poor.